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March 10, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
March 9, 1959

Others present: Secretary McElroy
 General Goodpaster



Secretary McElroy met briefly with the President following an earlier meeting of a larger group. The President said he wanted to discuss with him the effect of a possible suspension until later this fall of reductions currently being made in our Armed Forces strength. He said he had discussed the Berlin question with Secretary Dulles earlier in the day and that the Secretary had thought there might be valuable psychological effect from delaying these reductions.

The President noted that we must not be diverted from a firm and steady course by developing crises since we must so govern ourselves as to be able to live with the Soviet threat for the next thirty or forty years.

Mr. McElroy said that General Taylor had told him it would not be possible to reestablish the STRAC Division currently being disbanded without adding some thirteen thousand spaces above the 870,000 approved total strength.

He said that much of this push comes from Congressman Vinson who is simply using the Berlin situation as an excuse to try to get a reversal of the decision regarding strengths, which he is going to try to get in any event. Mr. McElroy thought it is much better to get our program right and then hold to it. He added that he believes it was a mistake at the time of the Lebanese and Quemoy crises to defer the cutback in force strength.

The President said that Mr. Dulles had commented along the lines that either something will happen or not growing out of the Berlin crisis. If something does happen, the Administration will be severely taxed with public clamor that this cut in forces was a cause

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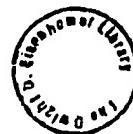
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of the Soviet action. Mr. McElroy said he recognizes this but would still recommend not deferring the cut.

The President asked what re-enlistment rate of Regulars is being achieved under the higher pay plan that went into effect last year. He asked me to look this up. Mr. McElroy recalled that Congress last year removed the requirement that the Army take a certain number of low category personnel through the draft, and this has greatly relieved the demand for spaces both for these men and for unremunerative training for them, as well as for disciplinary barracks which they tend to fill. He said that a great deal of the pressure to suspend the cutback in forces is really aimed at preventing a closing down of Fort Chaffee and Camp Polk.

After further discussion, the President agreed that he could go ahead with his cutbacks for the moment. Mr. McElroy commented that he expected the Army to be down to a strength of 875,000 by the end of March.

A. J. Goodpaster
Brigadier General, USA



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